

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING  
3/17/10

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**Meeting Date:** March 17, 2010

**Called to Order:** 6:00 PM

**Finance Committee Members Present:** John Hanold, Rob Allen, Marge Levenson, Michael Naughton and Lynn Reynolds

**Montague Selectmen Present:** Patricia Pruitt and Mark Fairbrother

**Others Present:** Frank Abbondanzio (Town Administrator) arrived at 6:24 PM, Carolyn Olsen (Town Accountant), Raymond Zukowski (Police Chief)

**Minutes**

BOS Moved: To approve the minutes of March 10, 2010.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

FC Moved: To approve the minutes of March 10, 2010.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained

**Public Safety Budget Hearing**

The following questions were asked and answered (underlined portion) via e-mail prior to the meeting: Additional discussion is in italics.

**Public Safety**

1. **Both Depts.:** Considering the required 24/7 coverage, how is any salary savings possible under 3% reduction alternative? None shown in Dispatch, modest amount in Police. To fill shifts 24-7 and to maintain a safe adequate level of coverage it is impossible to reduce the budget 3 %. We had 17 officers at one time and are now down to 15.
2. **Both Depts.:** Why do paid holidays vary from year to year? This varies by the year's schedule and who works, some lines are a bit heavier than others so holiday pay fluctuates depending on the line working. Also, if reserve staff cover holidays it's straight-time, not O/T.
3. **Dispatch:** Full-Time Wages + Overtime are unchanged from FY10; given step-changes on all employees, is this attainable? I have an increase of \$2,162 for FT wages and an increase of \$415 on the FT OT wages.
4. **Dispatch:** I notice P/T rates are higher than F/T rates for Communication Officers; is this the reason we fill many shifts with P/T rather than converting positions to F/T, or is there another reason? Is employee preference part of the reason? *If a part time per diem with experience is hired, they usually start at a higher step. A full time dispatcher with no experience will start at the bottom step.*
5. **Dispatch:** What is "TFFD Wages? (4)" and why was same amount budgeted for FY11 though nothing has been spent to date in FY10? This is possible added pay from TFFD for handling their calls; there is no agreement yet. The Fire District is still working on an ambulance service and if that happens they will be billed for handling their calls. It probably will and should evolve to where we answer all their incoming calls both emergency and non emergency. Presently dispatch handles 911 calls and transfers calls for fire to TFFD. If the TFFD brings in an ambulance, dispatch will be

*handling those calls as well. At that point dispatch will likely also take over TFFD non-emergency calls as well. Dispatchers will require more training to cover ambulance calls. This training and any additional compensation for dispatchers will be paid by the TFFD.*

6. **Dispatch:** Are there plans for future co-operation with TFFD? Same answer as Number 5.
7. **Dispatch:** Have past training/turn-over challenges changed sufficiently that level of Training budget – under-spent in FY10 – can change? *In the past there was a lot of turnover in dispatch with the town paying for training and dispatchers then leaving for other positions. Chief Zukowski thinks the current employees are looking forward to adding the ambulance calls and the additional compensation. The current group of employees seems fairly stable.*
8. **Police:** What efforts are in place to fill vacant shifts with overtime, versus straight-time, officers? By contract the officers have right of first refusal on all overtime. Ms. Levenson thinks the issue of filling shifts with full time officers first is something that should be addressed in the next contract, and asked if the contract could be re-written to give Reserve Officers the first right of refusal. With Comp time I have restricted taking comp time in as far as it can not be taken if it costs OT to fill. By Contract, an officer can receive compensatory time at time and a half instead of being paid overtime. The Chief put a policy into effect where an officer cannot take comp time unless the officer filling it takes comp time, or if shift can go unfilled.
9. **Police:** The 3% cut alternative shows a reduction in F/T wages and Overtime and P/T Wages; what effect does this have on coverage? What would you do under this alternative that you would not due within the Requested budget? I would have to cut one staff member. That is the only way. This leaves dangerous staffing levels affecting both the safety of the officers and the response time to calls for service.
10. **Police:** Are under-spent Longevity and Fitness simply timing of payments? Yes, officers usually take their fitness test in June when the weather is better and school is out as they use the high school track for the run aspect of the test. Longevity is issued on the anniversary date of employment for each officer that is eligible.
11. **Police:** Training is overspent in FY10, but unchanged for FY11: will department needs still be met? No, but I have no other areas to cut from. I would need \$20,000 for proper training levels. Each officer should receive forty hours of in-service training per year. This is a standard set by the Mass Training Council. That is currently impossible with the restrictions on the budget. We could easily be sued over the lack of training issues. Many towns are dealing with the issue of lack of funding for necessary training.
12. **Police:** What effect has four months occupancy of the new station had on budgeting FY11? A Telephone change is shown, are there other ups or downs (excluding utilities)? The new building is a work in progress with what it costs to run. I will know better after we have been here longer. I just had to lease a copy machine this week for dispatch as it was not working out making copies in the officers work area.
13. **Police:** (This affects a revenue rather than the departmental budget.) Does the policy for use of the Community Room allow for a fee, under some circumstances, for incremental utility and custodial cost? In addition to use by residents, are there

revenue opportunities for regional training of public safety personnel, emergency responders, etc.? (We recognize the revenue would not appear in your department.) The only policy I have on the community room is an unwritten one that it can be used by town related non profit groups. When we were selling this project to the Town I said and pushed for the room to be an adequate size so we could host local police and fire trainings and to make it available for town connected groups. The advantage to that is two fold, it saves on travel time expenses and most training allows free attendance for the agency that is hosting the event. I was going to ask to have a training room line item created say for \$1,000 for issues and related costs. When groups meet at the PD the town businesses gain when attendees go out to get lunch, coffee or whatever. It is a positive thing for the nearby businesses.

14. **Police:** In FY10 an urgent replacement of a cruiser was paid from other sources; what did the department not do in FY10, as a result of re-directing of those funds? What would be done differently in FY11 if Town Meeting appropriates money for a cruiser? By not using the JAG award \$26,465 it took away the option of buying equipment that the department needs to continuously upgrade such as radios, tasers, defibrillators, computers and other related items.

Additional information from Chief Zukowski: Over the last few years the police department has implemented several changes that are producing revenue for the town. We have increased parking tickets from \$5.00 to \$10.00 and I plan on asking those be raised again after we run out of the current supply of printed tickets. \$20.00 would be a fair up to date price. Working with Patty Dion unpaid tickets are now turned over to the Town's Deputy Collector and collection is attached to the Registry of Motor Vehicles Data base. This assures payment at an inflated rate by not allowing renewal of licenses and registrations. The alarm by-law has been in effect since July and is producing revenue so far we have issued by-law tickets in the amount \$1750.00 for those who have had three false alarm warnings and are now paying progressive fines.

The police department last year took over the animal control function, which saved the town approximately \$30,000. We lost \$40,000 in community policing money which paid for equipment, Drug Task Force, TRIAD programs and many town related coverages that we would not charge for. Items such as Old Home Days, parades, block party, extra holiday and weekend patrols, etc. were cut. \$26,465 was taken for the cruiser purchase with CP money used to pay the remaining balance. Our OT budget was cut \$30,000 as well on town meeting floor. I had to wait months to replace Detective Brown's position with that cut to keep the budget fairly close. Most of that \$30,000 that was cut is contractual OT and I may be asking for a reserve fund transfer this spring.

Additional information:

- The dog pound expenses are shared with Greenfield and Deerfield.
- Since Montague no longer has a specific Animal Control Officer, Greenfield's ACO handles calls if Montague needs someone with specific training.

- The line item expense for Kennel Fees is no longer needed since the dog pound is being used, but that money might be needed for another purpose such as euthanasia. Decision made to move the amount in that line item request to Medical/Veterinary.
- Mr. Naughton asked if there was a sense of likely increase in call volume if the TFFD adds the ambulance. Chief Zukowski estimated 2 calls per day for ambulance and maybe 2-3 regular business calls per hour. Dispatch distinguishes between calls for service and other business calls and they only track calls for services. If the ambulance adds too much call volume they will need to adjust staffing.
- If 911 calls are not answered due to call volume, they are automatically forwarded to Greenfield and vice versa.
- Mr. Naughton's point is that right now the TFFD is paying someone to answer their phones internally. If Montague takes over those calls, it looks like they would only be paying \$1 per hour, which may not be a fair proportion of the costs.
- Mr. Abbondanzio asked why we addressed taking the TFFD volume as an additional compensation issue and feels that any moneys received should be general fund receipts and not used to augment wages because they are doing the same job, albeit with perhaps more volume. Mr. Abbondanzio noted that any changes to the compensation scale may affect other employees.
- Mr. Naughton asked if the dispatchers have been lead to believe they will get a pay increase that may not occur.
- Chief Zukowski feels that if you look at other agencies, you would find that other dispatchers that do all three tasks are paid more than what our current staff make.
- Ms. Levenson asked that, since the School Committee voted to eliminate the School Resource Officer (SRO), is the Police Department intending to pick up that position, and incorporate that cost or eliminating an officer. Chief Zukowski responded that the officer would likely be put into a split shift to fill a current void. They are trying to work out a schedule to have two detectives to fill in certain shifts, etc.
- Ms. Levenson asked if SRO files logs like other officers. Chief Zukowski said that last year Detective Brown had over 80 incidents for which he had to write reports such as larcenies. Last year the school was adamant that they wanted the SRO while the Chief wanted to put that officer back on the road.
- Mr. Naughton understands reasoning on staffing, but would like to hear from the Board of Selectmen in terms of how to use the former SRO, and whether we need the same level of overall staffing.
- Ms. Pruitt asked if they need someone going to court for child abuse cases even if there was not a SRO. The department still needs a juvenile officer for those issues, regardless of whether that person also acts as a SRO.
- Ms. Levenson asked if there's been increased use of the new holding cells. The Chief noted that there have been over 100 people held so far this year, and the extra cells saves time because they no longer have to transport prisoners to the House of Corrections.
- Ms. Levenson asked about the false alarm bylaw and whether the fine was sufficient. Chief noted there is no charge until the 4<sup>th</sup> alarm, with increasing fines up to \$200 for additional false alarms. If the company calls to cancel the call before an officer is sent, or if the false alarm is due to weather, these are not counted as false alarm calls.

- Mr. Naughton asked, regarding the 3% cut, is that a workable budget? The answer is no. Mr. Naughton says we can either determine that we can realistically make a cut or we can make cuts knowing that we'll need more money before the end of the fiscal year, and he doesn't think we should do the second. The Chief said that if the Finance Committee went for the 3% reduction, he would almost certainly be asking for more money before the end of the fiscal year. The Chief noted that they really stepped up to the plate with recent budget cuts, and doesn't see how they can cut any more and still met the most basic of services.
- It was noted that the Capital Improvements Committee voted to recommend the cruiser for the FY11 budget.
- The new building is working out well. The Police Department has very good cooperation with the TFFD.

**Special Town Meeting Articles**

**Article #2** To appropriate an additional \$15,000 to the Reserve Fund, to be funded from Free Cash.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #2.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend approval of Article #2.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #3** To appropriate an additional \$25,000 for the Legal budget, to be funded from Free Cash.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #3.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend approval of Article #3.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #4** To create a separate Franklin County Technical School Stabilization Fund.

**Article #5** To rename the current Educational Stabilization Fund to the Gill-Montague Regional School District Stabilization Fund.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #4 and #5.

Vote: 2 In Favor 1 Opposed 2 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend approval of Article #4.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend approval of Article #5.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #6** To enact a new section, the “Stretch Energy Code” to the town by-laws.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #6.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #7** To add Leverett to the FCSWMD, which would slightly reduce Montague’s assessment.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #7.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #8** To appropriate \$91,450 for the first long-term debt payment for the Public Safety Facility, to be funded from the Town Stabilization Fund.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #8

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend approval of Article #8.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Article #9** To approve \$750,000 for the purchase of infrastructure improvements, to be funded by borrowing. Savings are expected to offset the debt costs.

**Article #10** To authorize the Selectmen to enter into an Energy Savings Performance Contract with Siemens Building Technology for the purpose of infrastructure improvements.

FC Moved: To recommend approval of Article #9 and #10.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Anyone with suggestions for background information on articles should send them to Mr. Abbondanzio.

### **Estimated Revenue Adjustments**

The legislators are recommending a 4% decrease in State Aid (as opposed to the current estimated 10% reduction from FY10), and the GMRSD’s proposed budget eliminates the School Resource Officer. Should the estimated revenues be adjusted to reflect these items?

FC Moved: To recommend changing the estimated state aid to reflect a 4% reduction from FY10, and to remove the estimated revenue for the SRO.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOSMoved: To recommend changing the estimated state aid to reflect a 4% reduction from FY10, and to remove the estimated revenue for the SRO.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

The town has also had confirmation of \$12,000 in rental income for FY11 from the Gill-Montague Bridge contractor for some of the space vacated by the Police Department.

BOS adjourned at 7:57 PM

Ms. Levenson left the meeting at 7:57 PM.

### **Separate Solid Waste Department in Budget**

The DPW would like to isolate the solid waste costs in the same way the town isolated public building utilities for two reasons. One is that this is currently a large, uncontrolled cost, and with the combined budget those large increases must be absorbed by the rest of the DPW budget. The second reason for the request is to provide more information to town meeting. If the Solid Waste costs are shown separately, residents know exactly what trash pickup costs.

FC Moved: To show the Solid Waste expenses in a separate budget for FY11.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

### **Adjust Department Budgets for Legal and Tax Title Expenses and Lower Reserve Fund?**

- Mr. Hanold noted that in the past these budgets have been level funded or cut, but almost every year a reserve fund transfer or additional appropriation by town meeting is needed.
- Ms. Reynolds wants to continue hearing from those departments when additional money is needed.
- Mr. Hanold noted that having a budget that is too low is showing a false image when you know that you'll end up needing the money.
- Mr. Naughton sees two issues and is not in favor of lowering the reserve fund and noted that there are other areas that may require additional funding. Would prefer that these go on a list with other items and discuss when votes are taken on departmental budgets.
- Ms. Olsen noted that DPW Gas and Diesel are currently level funded for FY11, and it is very unlikely that these will be adequate amounts.

### **Oversight Group**

Last week's meeting was cancelled because Tupper Brown discovered that Ms. Lynch from DESE was not planning to come. They are now scheduled to meet March 25<sup>th</sup> here at 7 PM.

**Next Meeting:** March 24, 2010 at 6:00 PM General Budget Discussion

Adjourned at 8:20 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Olsen